

MY ADVENTURE IN SEARCH OF GARIBALDI.

I HAD never seen Italy, its palaces and picture galleries, and all the other glorious sights which Mr. Murray kindly catalogues in red, and Mr. Coghlan in blue. So I crossed Mount Cenis, and went gradually southward from city to city, allowing myself just time to rush about the chief towns, with a guidebook in my hand, and a Cicerone at my heels, and to get a satisfactory stare at the lions, whether of marble or bronze, or painted canvas, or mouldering and mossy stone.

Rome, I confess, although it was the unhealthy vintage season, when the Campagna is a nest of fevers, and timid folks feel the malaria in every hot puff of wind that blows over the brown plain.—Rome, I confess, detained me too long. I could not get away; I could not get through my round of sight-seeing, though I worked like a horse in a mill, plodding through miles of pictures and acres of statuary, and consuming much of the time I meant to devote to martial proceedings. In spite of my own hurry, and although I wore out and expended in my service two of the stoutest *laquais de place* in the Eternal City, I spent ten days in Rome. But when I started, I could not blame myself for thus lingering. I had little prospect of seeing Rome again for many a long day. My aunt's legacy, on the strength of which I became a voyager, was waxing less and less, and I had no particular chance of another bequest; so I was right to make hay while the sun shone, and see all I could while my purse was still fairly replete.

Off I went at last in the Naples estafette, with a team of half-wild Roman horses, screaming and biting each other, and tearing along the dusty roads in proper courier style. My head was in a perfect whirl, stuffed with great ghostly churches, classic ruins, wildernesses of noseless busts, chipped urns, and truncated idols, to say nothing of priests, pictures, and theatrical peasantry. But, presently, the memory of all these things began to give place to the anticipations of what I was going to see, real, spirit-stirring war, genuine combats, and all the pomp, pride, and circumstance of a grand historic struggle, of which I was about to be the spectator. Why not chronicler, as well as spectator? and why not more than either?

This was a theatre where the audience every now and then sprang over the footlights, and took a share in the stage business, hand in hand with the regular performers. So might I. I had read in the "Times" how amateurs had suddenly stepped forward under a heavy fire, and led into action some scattered company of Garibaldi's Redshirts, who always appeared but too happy to follow these improvised captains. Even my learned elder brother (if he will allow me to call him so) of the English bar, had towered in the front of battle, counselling heroes, chiding laggards, and recommending or directing the summary execution of runaways. Why not I? At any rate, among so many impromptu warriors, I might try my hand and my nerves, go where I was certain to be shot at, and see how I liked it; and if I did like it, why, I might spend all the rest of my holiday with the adventurous gentlemen "in front," and have something to relate to admiring grand-

children in the year 1890, or thereabouts. How sweet, when relating the Liberation of Italy, to be able to add the words, "Et quorum pars magna fui!" Thus I thought as we trotted and galloped along the causeway that traverses those pestilent Pontine Marshes; and then, after a hurried meal of fruit and chocolate at Terracina, we approached the frontier of Naples, where estafettes are changed.

With all our speed, we were behind time,—no uncommon event in Italy. In fact, we were eight hours overdue, half the delay lying at the door of the Papal Post Office, and the other on a smashed axletree which gave way in the heart of the Marshes, and procured us a delectable sojourn among the poisonous swamps, until a smith could be brought from Terracina to complete the repairs. No wonder that we found the Neapolitan courier in a rage, swearing like a pagan, and predicting his own dismissal on account of our delay. Very ill-humoured was the man of boots and bullion, as he locked the letter-bags and more sacred despatches in the boot of his dirty vehicle, which still bore the royal arms, to my surprise; though, when the versatile Neapolitan recovered his good temper, he showed me a fine silken flag, of the three magic colours, white, green, and red, wherewith he could cover the obnoxious Bourbon blazonry when he got within the Garibaldian outposts.

"Then why bear the royal arms at all?" asked I, with unsophisticated curiosity.

"And the garrison of Gaëta, then?" screeched the courier, with a shrug, and a grin of scorn at my obtuseness. "Madonna mia! I value my skin too much to offend the soldiers of King Francis. They would grill me like a carbonado, those *bricconi*, if they caught but a glimpse of the pretty silk banner that I am obliged to carry into Naples; know you that, Signor?"

So far, so good; and though the mail was dirty and the seats hard, the lean horses went a famous pace, until we reached Fondi—dark, dirty, brigand-breeding Fondi, where our team was to be changed. Up we flashed to the post-house, but only to be received by open doors and wringing of hands, and the heathen howls of osters and postilions. I never heard the body of Bacchus so frequently invoked before or since, or so many oaths, curses, and prayers, as the distracted denizens of the post-house gave vent to in five minutes. Our courier, that gold-laced Ganymede, who now divided his allegiance between King Francis and Garibaldi, soon caught the alarm, and tore his hair, and flung up his arms, and blasphemed with the best of them.

What was the matter? I partly guessed, but wanted some assurance, and I got it at last from a dishevelled woman with grey hair, who looked like an elderly Fury, but was, I believe, only the postmaster's grandmother. The story was brief and simple. The King wanted horses for his artillery train, and a party of Bavarians had just swept up every four-footed creature in Fondi, not leaving the postmaster a single hoof in his stable. Of course, the mail could not proceed. No wonder the courier was hallooing so piteously to Hercules and St. Januarius for help, mixing up all creeds in a breath, as Italians will. But it suggested itself to me, and to the other passengers, too, that if there were no horses, perhaps there were some

mules. Italian mules are fine, strapping brutes, and, with a peasant to each, we might yet organise a very decent team, and reach some station not yet pillaged of its equine treasures. But this crumb of comfort was soon dashed from our lips. If we thought mules might, at a pinch, serve instead of horses, it seemed that the same luminous idea had suggested itself to the Royalist General of Artillery. The foragers, who had swooped on the horses, had also driven off every serviceable mule. Nothing was left but a humble ass or two, the property of some poor peasants. Here was a clinching argument. Of course, it would be ludicrous to suggest that the royal mail

should proceed with a squadron of donkeys. But I contrived, while the Italian passengers, with passive fatalism, engaged flea-haunted beds in the dismal and garlic-perfumed locanda, to hire a stout ass by private contract. It was not my intention to emulate Sancho, by ambling across the province on this long-eared quadruped: I was a capital walker, and hardly sorry to have so good an opportunity of stretching my legs, while the donkey, I thought, would serve to carry such light baggage as I had, and help me on to some town where I could get a vetturino carriage, and rattle on the rest of the way to Naples.

Accordingly, I started, glad to get away from



the voluble lamentations of the courier, and pretty sure that, sleep where I might, I could hardly light on a more unsavoury resting place than Fondi. The ass, which bore my portmanteau and bag, was a sturdy, well-conditioned ass, with plenty of red tassels and brass bells about its bridle, and a stout peasant lad to ensure with his cudgel that the pace was a fair one. Much of the summer heat was over, and though the air was rather heavy and oppressive, we made very good progress for about seven miles or so. At about that distance from Fondi lies a group of cottages, a mere hamlet, too small to possess a church, and where, to my disgust, no hospitable

bush, hanging over a door, told of purple wine within. I was very thirsty. My mouth was an oven, and my tongue painfully parched, and I would have given its weight in gold for a tumbler of frothing Bass; but even country wine seemed denied me. The peasant boy who drove the ass talked patois, and my Italian was chiefly learned out of Dante and other classics of the Arno, so we were not very intelligible conversationalists; but he seemed to indicate that if I could hope to get refreshments anywhere, it would be at a solitary wayside dwelling, about a hundred yards ahead. On I went, and there, sure enough, was an open door, and a leafy bush above it.

In a chair outside sat an old man, apparently enjoying the evening sun.

"Buon giorno!" I called out; "let me have some wine, and iced-water, too, if you have it, for I'm—"

Here I was cut short by not knowing the Italian word that stands for thirsty. The old man never moved. Asleep? I drew nearer. Yes, asleep, but in that last long sleep that none can break,—the solemn sleep of death. I started back with an involuntary cry. I had been addressing a dead man. The occupant of the chair was an old—probably a very old—man, for his wrinkled skin was yellow as an antique parchment, and the long but scanty locks that fell from under his black skull-cap were as white as snow. The hollow cheeks, the sunken features, told of gradual decay, and though the glassy eyes were open, the jaw had been carefully tied up, and a fair white linen cloth was folded around the breast of the corpse, while the hands were decorously disposed upon the lap, the withered fingers extended as if in prayer. On a nearer scrutiny, I observed that a small wooden platter was between the hands of the dead man, and in it lay several small coins of silver, and a much larger heap of copper. I now breathed more freely as I recollected to have heard of a singular custom which prevails in Italy, and with which all old residents are acquainted. When a death takes place in an indigent family, it is very usual to deposit the body, dressed in its holiday clothes, and with a plate between its hands, either at its own door, or in some public place, and to compel, as it were, this dumb and insensible mendicant to solicit alms of the charitable. The money obtained in this strange way goes to pay the expenses of the burial, not for the coffin, since bodies are buried uncoffined, but for masses, flowers, professional mourners, consecrated candles, and a sort of funeral-feast. This custom explained the presence of this ghastly guardian of the threshold, but still I shrank from it.

We Northern folks cannot but feel shocked at the callous manner in which Death, that dim, solemn mystery, is greeted by the natives of South Europe, and I admit that I felt a very great inclination to pursue my way with thirst unslaked, when a comely dark-haired woman, wearing the square kerchief of the Neapolitan peasantry of that province, came curtseying out to ask what could be done for my Excellency's service. Ashamed to run away from the presence of a dead body, I conquered my repugnance, entered the cottage, and asked for what refreshments I needed. The hostess, a buxom young matron, with a picturesque jacket of some bright colour and an immense rosary instead of the usual golden ornaments, was very chatty and pleasant, and told me that the Royalists had passed by that very afternoon on their foray for beasts of burden, but that she had no doubt but that, at Gaviaglio, or some such place, I should procure a carriage. I drank my wine-and-water, munched a few delicious grapes, and treated my guide to wine and the ass to water, all for a few carlini, and was taking my leave, when the hostess asked, with an apologetic smile, if I "would bestow a trifle on grandfather?"

"On grandfather?" said I, turning to where

the rigid figure sat, propped with cushions in its arm-chair; "do you mean that that is your grandfather, that—?"

"Sì Signor," answered she, "the best of parents, the dearest, kindest old soul—so pious too—ah! what a loss! Ah me!"

Wonderful how the moods of those Italians change! She was actually sobbing, that smiling sunny-featured woman, who had seemed, while tripping about to fetch me a cool flask of the best, or playing between whiles with her two plump-checked children, perfectly happy and content. But how little can we judge from mere outward show, and how often do we find the face a sorry index to the heart! She was evidently much affected by the mention of the old man—her husband's father, she said—who had died that very morning about dawn, at a great age. The platter was to collect money to buy masses for his soul, she said, "not that he had many sins, poor dear;" and then she sobbed again. I am as good a Protestant as any, but whatever I might think of masses in the abstract, I felt that here was a case where all the logic of Exeter Hall would be wasted—these poor simple folks—it was plain that nothing but the ceremonies of the church they were bred in could carry balm to their bruised hearts, and I felt that I should be a brute if I were to deposit less than a dollar in the plate. I laid down a dollar, accordingly, said a kind word or two in my broken Tuscan, and departed, but not before the grateful woman had insisted on kissing my Excellency's generous hand, and wishing my Excellency a prosperous journey.

We stepped vigorously out along the dusty road, the boy, the ass, and I, and though night was falling, I cared little; now we were among the blue hills, and out of the Pontine marshes, where the night air is deadly, blowing as it does over many a foul morass. For a league we pushed on gaily enough, but then came a broad blue flash, and then a roll of thunder, and then a burst of hail and heavy rain, while the flash and roll were incessant, and the sky grew pitchy dark. Wet, and blinded by lightning, there was no chance of making our way to the next town; indeed, the road was no longer to be seen, except when a flash showed it; so, after a short council of war, back we scamped to the little wayside hostelry that we had so lately left, and where alone, according to the boy, we could hope for shelter. Soon did British traveller, donkey, and lad, stand before the porch of the small house of entertainment, but though less than two hours had elapsed, a change had come over us all. The donkey shook his dripping ears, and hung his sleek head wretchedly, the boy was wet and alarmed, and I was a draggled object to look upon, but eagerly bent on obtaining shelter and a fire to dry my clothes. Of course we found the door shut, and the arm-chair and its mute occupant removed into the house. Nay, but for the drenched bush that the wind was buffeting backwards and forwards, we should not have known the house from any other cottage, seeing it as we did by the transient glare of the blue lightning. I lifted the latch, and, flinging wide the door, entered without ceremony. I found a family group assembled around their supper-table. There

was my buxom friend of the afternoon, with her two little ones nestling close to the maternal apron, there was a stout bronzed peasant, her husband, and a tall black-haired girl, who might have been the sister of husband or wife, and three sturdy younger brothers, in brown jackets and crimson sashes, eating brown bread and fried beans in a way calculated to have given Lord Chesterfield a heart-ache.

I must not forget the other member of the family—the dead man—whose chair stood now in the chimney-corner, which no doubt had been his place during life, and whose blank gaze and wan face were turned towards the crackling fire of sticks. The platter had been removed from between the stiffened hands, the linen-band untied from the jaw; this I noticed, but in no other respect had the body been disturbed. Not a look, as far as I could well see, was turned towards the inanimate member of the company. The careless Neapolitans were laughing over their meal as if there were no such thing as Death at all. But my arrival created a sensation I was at a loss to account for. The family jumped from their seats, with confused and terror-stricken faces, uttering a profusion of imprecations more or less pious, or the reverse, and seemed more perturbed than they ought to have been at the arrival of a chance traveller. I accosted the hostess as an acquaintance, mentioned the raging storm, and announced my intention of staying all night, if they could accommodate me. I cannot say that they seemed anxious to house so distinguished a guest! Indeed, they gave me a clear idea that, but for shame's sake, they would have pushed me out again into the rain. Of course they were too humble—their poor little hut was not fit for such as my Excellency, nurtured in palaces, &c., but at last they gave way, and promised to make me up a bed in one of the little rooms up-stairs. The boy and donkey they absolutely refused to shelter. No plea of mine or entreaty of his prevailed: boy and ass were ruthlessly denied accommodation, and I was obliged to dismiss them, with double pay, into the howling storm, to reach Fondi as they might. Then the door was shut and locked, and a wooden bar put across it. Sticks were thrown on the fire, and I stood before it, drying myself as best I might, my baggage lying at my feet. The people went on with their supper, but not quite as light-heartedly as before; their mirth was not so loud, and I thought they often cast a look askance at me. Then the hostess remembered her courtly manners, and deferentially asked if she could have the pleasure of setting anything before the Signor Inglese. It was not to be supposed that his English Excellency could eat beans, but perhaps an egg? so fresh, or some milk and chocolate? or a rasher of winter bacon? But his English Excellency, though he was hungry, said not a word in reply. I could not have spoken, had my life depended on my oratory. My heart leaped, and then stood still; my hair rose bristling, my brow grew damp with fear, my eyes were riveted with horror and half incredulous marvel on the white-haired, venerable corpse of the patriarch in the arm-chair. And no wonder! *I saw the dead man move!* The glossy eyes rolled horribly in their wrinkled orbits, the

jaws relaxed into a yawn, the arms were stretched as the arms of one awakening from sleep, and the old man's body rocked and quivered in the arm-chair. The sight of that yawning, glaring, moving corpse was almost too much for my nerves. I clutched the arm of the hostess; with a shrinking hand I pointed to the horrid sight—the hallucination—as I deemed it, of my fatigued senses. Ha! she sees it too, but I see no fear on her face. Some annoyance, perhaps, and a covert smile; surely I am mistaken; but—no, those dead lips move, work, speak! Audibly fall upon my agonised ear the hollow accents of the departed. What are those words that break the silence? What fearful revelation to the living necessitates such a breach of the laws of Nature? What secrets of the prison-house are about to be dragged into light? Let me listen to the dead man's awful speech.

"*Che ora è?*"

"What's o'clock?" that was all he said, upon my honour, as a gentleman. "What's o'clock?" A disembodied spirit bursting the gates of night, and intruding on the living, to ask what o'clock it was! They heard it. They all heard it. And my tortured ear was next insulted by such a peal of hearty horse laughter, begun by one, chorused by the rest, as I had seldom listened to. My brain reeled. Here was I, in presence of a corpse that demanded to know what o'clock it was, and the whole company were laughing like a menagerie of hyenas! "*Che ora è?*" repeated the dead man, into whose eyes there gradually stole more speculation than becomes the defunct, on the Swan's authority. And still the peasants laughed, and the deceased patriarch became more and more palpably alive. I gasped for breath, so utter was my amazement. I had read of trances and apparent deaths, and resuscitations, during funerals or after interment, but never had I heard of the dead alive being welcomed back into the bosom of their family, amid peals of uproarious laughter, as if their revival was a rare joke. But when the old man made an effort to rise, I could bear it no longer, but rushed to the door. To my surprise, one of the young men sprang up and set his back against it, grinning but resolute. Another jumped from his chair to reinforce.

"Scusa! Signor!" said the landlord, "but you cannot go just yet."

I insisted, tried to force my way, and was good-humouredly baffled. I got into a towering passion, but in vain. They were four to one, and they swore by all the saints that I should not stir a step. I had come for my own pleasure. I should stay for theirs.

"Do you want to rob me, you villains?" I shouted.

"Gracious Signor, the idea!"

"Are you brigands?"

"Signor, what a blunder! We are poor, but honest."

Then why would they not let me pass? "Signor, grandfather,"—that word explained all. I turned; the old man was actually seated at supper, affectionately waited on by his two daughters, and playing a capital knife and fork for one who had shuffled off this mortal coil.

"Then," said I, as I viewed the hoary humbug,

who I now saw was as completely alive as myself, "your precious parent was not dead, after all?"

They confessed that he was not.

"And his pretended death was produced by—"

"By this, *Signor carissimo*," said the hostess, opening a cupboard and exhibiting a bottle labelled chloroform.

"And this atrocious deception," I began, but was again interrupted with:

"*Signor Excellency*, have a little pity! We are poor industrious folks; we farm and we sell wine; but we have many mouths to feed, and there are debts. This is a harmless plan we have devised of raising a trifling sum to buy seed-corn and oil for winter. If grandfather were really dead, nobody would grudge a few carlini for his burial; and those kind souls who give under the belief that a dead hand holds out the platter, will be all the better for it in purgatory. The worst of it is, that your Excellency cannot go—"

"Cannot go!" I boiled over with wrath.

"If your Excellency could make shift with very poor accommodation until Friday?"

"Until Friday!" I could only repeat the impudent proposal. But the landlady and her spouse, with one accord though many words, proceeded to lay down before me the following propositions: *in primis*, that I had most inconveniently popped behind the scenes and pried into a Blue Beard chamber I had no right to know the secrets of; secondly, that unless the delusion were kept up, no profit could be expected, but rather popular vengeance; thirdly, that the two next days would be marked by a concourse of pilgrims to Fondi, for the festival of the holy and miracle-working St. Somebody, and a plentiful crop of small coin was expected. The fourth proposition was, that I should remain with them till the festa was over and the pilgrims gone home, that I should be fed, cherished, and lodged as well as could be expected, for the moderate remuneration of one scudo per day, and that then I should be permitted to depart, on giving my promise not to say a word about my unlawful detention, while within the kingdom of Naples.

Who would not have stormed in such a case of false imprisonment? I flew into a passion, and threatened dreadful revenge. I would go to the judge, and the intendant; and the archbishop, I believe; and the British consul, I am certain. Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should hear of it, and so should Garibaldi's Englishman. What did they think Lord Palmerston would say? To my chagrin, they had never heard of Lord Palmerston at all. They were obsolete, for their profits were at stake. After an hour's fiercely verbose argument, and five minutes' wrestling with one of the stout young cuba who held the door, I was forced to surrender at discretion, and accept the terms of the conquerors. *Vie victis!* What a miserable three nights and two days did I spend under that roof-tree, guarded like a prisoner of war, in spite of my parole, for there were always a couple of young peasants at my elbow, and they watched lest I should reveal the secret to any stray pilgrim! I slept in a little cockloft, well garnished by an interesting colony of mosquitoes; my bed was not a very bad one,

with its clean brown linen and its ticking stuffed with the husks of maize; they waited on me—the womankind, that is,—civilly enough, and they fed me with the best they had for my scudo a day, not too high a price, when one considers their enforced monopoly of my custom. I was not very uncomfortable, physically speaking, and had I chosen to stay for my own pleasure, should have been content. But upon compulsion! I roared inwardly with bitterness of spirit, as I saw the humble devotees troop by to the shrine of St. Somebody, and seldom fail to drop a few baiocchi, at least, into the platter of the venerable old scamp, who sat outside in his chair, as rigid and senseless as chloroform could make him. And then, the torment of seeing that aged impostor, as it were, off duty, and in the family circle, nightly to witness his recovery from the stupor due to the drug, to see him yawn and stretch, with a vivid remembrance of my original terrors, and then to lose my own appetite in witnessing his abominable performances as a trencherman. I never thought, when I heard that every one had a skeleton in his cupboard, that I should ever be forced into intimacy with such a grisly piece of property, that I should breakfast and sup every day with the family skeleton occupying the head of the table, and generally demeaning itself as the founder of the feast.

He was not a bad old man either; a cackling, child-petting old grandsire he seemed, when desisting from his praiseworthy exertions for the benefit of his relatives. His third appearance before the public was, I am happy to say, the last. The pilgrims had ceased to flow past, and the carlini to rattle in the plate, and the Dead Alive had already obtained a haul of money. Besides, the old gentleman's health might suffer from further chloroforming, his affectionate relatives being resolved to postpone his final and legitimate exhibition as long as filial piety could contrive it. For these various reasons the show came to an end, and my imprisonment along with it. The neighbours were called to witness the happy recovery of grandpapa, who had been three days in a trance, and suddenly awaked amid the congratulations of his kindred. All incredulity was repressed by the presence of the four sturdy peasants, who were ready with cudgel and fist to maintain, if necessary, that their progenitor had been as dead as Julius Caesar, and was now as living as Mazzini. And the timely gift of a brace of dollars brought in the alliance of the church, the curé of the next village publicly avowing the resuscitation as a pure miracle, not wholly unconnected with the Immaculate Conception, nor entirely divested of reference to the future triumph of Papal authority over heretics and red shirts; by which we may guess that the curé was of the reactionary party.

I departed in sullen silence, answering no word to the salutations and blessings of the Phoenix and his offspring. And they wished my Excellency a good journey, and called me their preserver, the hypocrites! I got somehow to Naples, through the burned and pillaged country, but the time lost was irrevocable: my holiday was spoiled. I went to the front. I plunged into the midst of Garibaldi's ragged heroes, and I nearly got hit by a shell or two from the fortress, but skirmish or

battle royal saw I none. Brief as was my stay, I missed the homeward-bound steamer, had to wait a week for another, and finally reached Dover just on the last day of the vacation. JOHN HARWOOD.